The Man was Born a Slave . . .

THE CASE OF THE

BACK IN THE GASLIT ERA OF 1888, the person who served to take Victorians' minds off London's "Jack the Ripper" was perhaps the most extraordinary figure to grace an editorial chair in the city's 100-year history of publishing.

He was "Dr." Gustavus Hamilton Griffin, 48-year-old editor of The Social World, a weekly magazine aimed at the carriage trade, published from an upstairs room at the corner of Broad and Yates.

In his off hours "Doc" Griffith and his good-looking young wife occupied a comfortable bed-sitting-room at Alex McDonald's Windsor Hotel, at the corner of Government and Courtney. Griffin also set some sort of sartorial record for Victoria journalists, for as he walked up Government Street to his office every morning he was easily recognizable. He was the only man in town who continually wore a top hat, matching his morning coat, striped trousers and spats. The gold-knobbed rosewood cane he invariably carried was in theme with the flower in his button-hole. Although he brightened the thoroughfare, still there was always a touch of mystery about this moon-faced bon vivant who twirled the ends of his small moustache to spikey points, and made liberal use of pomade and eau de Cologne. Sometimes, pulling on his lemon-colored gloves, his cane under his arm, he'd drop some classical allusion, which gave his intimates chance to remark: "Quite a scholar, that chap Griffin."

THIS, HIS STORY

There was a coffee-colored cast to his complexion giving some the idea that he might have been an Eurasian. Of his past, he'd dropped enough from time to time to let Victorians know that his father had been James Hewittson Griffin, QC, of Edinburgh, who died in 1862. His mother was Marie, third daughter of Dr. Thomas Hardienne of Toulon, France. Griffin himself was born in London on Jan. 1, 1840, got his MD at Edinburgh University in 1858, his BA at London University in 1872. He spoke disjointed scraps of several languages, was quite a musician, and had a good tenor voice. It was often heard at St. John's Church on Sunday mornings.

His wife, a few years his juntor, was an attractive young woman who came from Ontario.

Griffin's magazine, The Social World, an erudite little publication, sprung to life in the spring of 1888, but by midsummer it was plain to see had failed to catch on. As a sideline, Griffin absented himself now and again from his editorial chores to visit Nanaimo where he was interested in coal; in fact took up an option on some acreage with this in mind.

It was at the time when 63-year-old Robert Dunsmuir was an Island tycoon. Thirty-six years before he'd come out from Ayrshire to work some upcoast mines for the Hudson's Bay Company, then branched out for himself at Nanaimo. Later he discovered the Wellington field and by 1888 not only had a fleet of colliers, but had built the Esquimalt & Nanaimo Railway, entered politics (and became president of the Executive Council) and besides being perhaps the province's most important figure . . . he knew it!

B.C.'S FIRST millionaire, he believed in living like B.C.'s first millionaire—in a castle that cost half a million dollars, travelling his domain by private yacht and railroad car. Of course, being the typical Victorian era coal and railroad baron, he was target for plenty of attacks—attacks that came mostly from free-spoken and free-swinging B.C. newspaper editors, men who called a spade a spade . . . even at the risk of having it doubled or redoubled by a judge and jury!

Before Los Angeles police used the camera for identification, steel engravings of wanted criminals were circulated. A collector's item, the original of this picture is in Cecil Clark's collection. The man is pomaded and elegant self-styled Dr. G. Hamilton Griffin, a racketeering rascal who was finally unmasked in Victoria.

This year of 1888 was no exception. First man to be tagged for a court appearance that summer was William (later Senator) Templeman, managing editor of the Victoria Times, who averred that Dunsmuir "carried the government in his breeches pocket" and wanted to know how many roads had been built to Dunsmuir mines at public expense. He said other things, too, that weren't exactly fair comment.

In the subsequent court action Dunsmuir, asking for $5,000 damages, had to be content with $500. If it was only 10 per cent, he collected it the hard way: by making the sheriff step in to collect . . . after the banks had closed.

In the journalistic atmosphere of the day this would have been the occasion for The Colonist to editorialize on journalistic ethics, but W. H. Ellis and A. G. Sargison, Colonist proprietors, were busy in court themselves fighting a libel action launched by the city's Mayor Grant. They'd intimated that Grant held off the auditors until his absconding friend, the city treasurer, had time to get to Port Townsend. Harry Heywood of the competing Victoria Star also had no time for comment: he'd been yanked into court on a libel charge by Joe Boscowitz. During the hearing, outside the courtroom another couple waited their turn; Cotton and Gordon, proprietors of the Vancouver News-Advertiser who were being sued by Dunsmuir for misquoting him. Their defence was simple; they'd merely copied it from a Portland paper.

When the Boscowitz-Heywood action finished, the Star's manager found himself a witness at the Fall Assizes; and who should be there to keep him company but the assistant editor of the Victoria Evening Standard, Maurice Lopatecki. The reason for their appearance was all on account of our dapper friend in the top hat, the editor of The Social World. By and large, it was a busy year for Victoria newspapermen.

The Griffin case started that summer when across Robert Dunsmuir's desk at the E. & N. offices on Government Street came a curious missive. It was addressed to him alright, but undated and unsigned. On a single sheet of notepaper was a single sentence written partly in Spanish and partly in Greek. Below the phrase was pencilled the outline of a human hand. Dunsmuir couldn't make head or tail of it, and asked his secretary, Whyte, to try and translate it. With the aid of a Spanish-English dictionary Whyte got a glimmer of the meaning but had to rely mainly on the Rev. Mr. Beanlands to untangle the Greek.

Translated, the note read: "You have to die very soon. By Order."

DUNSMUIR THOUGHT nothing of it, until five days later he got another letter. Deciphered, this one said: "We send you another mandate. Beware. We know all that you are doing. Prepare for death."

As there was a meeting of the Executive that morning, Dunsmuir took the letters with him to the wooden Legislative Building and, handing them to the attorney-general, suggested he try to find the sender. "Looks like a matter for the city police," said the attorney-general. "You'd better give them to the chief."

Came then, at five-day intervals, other notes. One said: "He who acts unjustly must be brought before the judges to be punished."

Said the next: "On the 28th of September we are going to kill you. It makes no difference if you have detectives; they are fools and cannot do anything. Prepare yourself. The time comes near when you will be no more."

CALLED POLICE

The letters so far had arrived on the 1st, 5th, 10th and 15th of August. In line with the attorney-general's suggestion, Dunsmuir got in touch with Chief of Police Charles Bloomfield. There seemed to be no clue to go on, except that the letters were all postmarked Victoria, and after a few days' investigation, Bloomfield suggested to Dunsmuir that a little outside help might be in order.

A wire was despatched to J. J. Mahoney's Detective Agency in San Francisco, and a few days later investigator Howard L. Branthaven landed in Victoria. He registered at the Occidental Hotel on Johnson Street as D. L. Howard, and later discreetly contacted Chief Bloomfield to get the rundown on the Dunsmuir letters.

The last letter had mentioned Sept. 28 as the fatal day, but the day came and went without any attempt on Dunsmuir's life.

Finally the San Francsco detective proposed a "stake-out" around the post office on Government Street to help trap the anonymous writer.

Post office clerk James Smith watched the inside drop while Const. J. M. Langley (later to be Victoria's police chief) idled around on the street. Despite this steady watch, another letter arrived on Dunsmuir's desk.

It read: "We have not forgotten anything. We have not fulfilled our decrees because there are other circumstances, but the time will come. We thought you were a better man, but we see you are as bad as ever. If you remember the past you ought to take care of the future."

It was later learned this letter had been posted in the box at Pandora and Blanshard.

Branthaven busied himself trying to trace the notepaper and finally, with the aid of Dunsmuir's right-hand man, Whyte, he nailed the source as Waitt's stationery on Government.

THERE THE LEAD vanished. The paper was a popular brand, and could have been bought by anybody.

Branthaven then tried to backtrack on peculiarities in the writing and the thought struck him that possibly the writer wasn't a scholar, merely someone who had copied the phrases from a textbook. It was a theory in which clergyman Beanlands couldn't help, but he suggested